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Ex. Doc. No. 3.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

APPROVAL OF THE OREGON BILL.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

NOTIFYING

The House of Representatives of his approval of the bill "to establish the territorial government of Oregon."

DECEMBER 6, 1848.

Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

To the House of Representatives of the United States:

When the President has given his official sanction to a bill which has passed Congress, usage requires that he shall notify the House in which it originated of that fact. The mode of giving this notification has been by an oral message delivered by his private secretary.

Having this day approved and signed an act entitled "an act to establish the territorial government of Oregon," I deem it proper, under the existing circumstances, to communicate the fact in a more solemn form. The deeply interesting and protracted discussions which have taken place in both Houses of Congress, and the absorbing interest which the subject has excited throughout the country, justify, in my judgment, this departure from the form of notice observed in other cases. In this communication with a co-ordinate branch of the government, made proper by the considerations referred to, I shall frankly and without reserve express the reasons which have constrained me not to withhold my signature from the bill to establish a government over Oregon, even though the two territories of New Mexico and California are to be left for the present without governments. None doubt that it is proper to establish a government in Oregon. Indeed it has been too long delayed. I have made repeated recommendations to Congress to this effect.

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The petitions of the people of that distant region have been presented to the government and ought not to be disregarded. To give to them a regularly organized government and the protection of our laws, which as citizens of the United States they claim, is a high duty on our part, and one which we are bound to perform unless there be controlling reasons to prevent it.

In the progress of all governments questions of such transcendent importance occasionally arise as to cast in the shade all those of a mere party character. But one such question can now be agitated in this country, and this may endanger our glorious Union—the source of our greatness and all our political blessings. This question is slavery. With the slaveholding States this does not embrace merely the rights of property, however valuable; but it ascends far higher and involves the domestic peace and security of every family.

The fathers of the constitution, the wise and patriotic men who laid the foundation of our institutions, foreseeing the danger from this quarter, acted in a spirit of compromise and mutual concession on this dangerous and delicate subject, and their wisdom ought to be the guide of their successors. Whilst they left to the States, exclusively, the question of domestic slavery within their respective limits, they provided that slaves who might escape into other States not recognizing the institution of slavery shall “be delivered up on the claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.”

Upon this foundation the matter rested until the Missouri question arose.

In December, 1819, application was made to Congress by the people of the Missouri territory for admission into the Union as a State. The discussion upon the subject in Congress involved the question of slavery, and was prosecuted with such violence as to produce excitements alarming to every patriot in the Union. But the good genius of conciliation, which presided at the birth of our institutions, finally prevailed; and the Missouri compromise was adopted. The eighth section of the act of Congress of the 6th of March, 1820, “to authorize the people of the Missouri territory to form a constitution and State government,” &c., provides: “That in all that territory ceded by France to the United States, under the name of Louisiana, which lies north of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude, not included within the limits of the State contemplated by this act, slavery and involuntary servitude, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes, whereof the parties shall have been duly convicted, shall be, and is hereby, forever prohibited: *Provided, always,* That any person escaping into the same from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any State or Territory of the United States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service, as aforesaid.”

This compromise had the effect of calming the trouble waves, and restoring peace and good will throughout the States of the Union.

The Missouri question had excited intense agitation of the public mind, and threatened to divide the country into geographical parties, alienating the feelings of attachment which each portion of our Union should bear to every other. The compromise allayed the excitement, tranquilized the popular mind, and restored confidence and fraternal feelings. Its authors were hailed as public benefactors.

I do not doubt that a similar adjustment of the questions which now agitate the public mind, would produce the same happy results. If the legislation of Congress on the subject of the other territories shall not be adopted in a spirit of conciliation and compromise, it is impossible that the country can be satisfied, or that the most disastrous consequences shall fail to ensue.

When Texas was admitted into the Union the same spirit of compromise which guided our predecessors in the admission of Missouri, a quarter of a century before, prevailed, without any serious opposition. The joint resolution for annexing Texas to the United States, approved March the first, one thousand eight hundred and forty-five, provides that "such States as may be formed out of that portion of said territory lying south of thirty-six degrees thirty minutes, north latitude, commonly known as the Missouri compromise line, shall be admitted into the Union with or without slavery, as the people of each State asking admission may desire. And in such State or States as shall be formed out of said territory north of the Missouri compromise line, slavery or involuntary servitude (except for crime) shall be prohibited."

The territory of Oregon lies far north of thirty-six degrees thirty minutes, the Missouri and Texas compromise line. Its southern boundary is the parallel of 42°, leaving the intermediate distance to be three hundred and thirty geographical miles. And it is because the provisions of this bill are not inconsistent with the laws of the Missouri compromise, if extended from the Rio Grande to the Pacific ocean, that I have not felt at liberty to withhold my sanction. Had it embraced territories south of that compromise, the question presented for my consideration would have been of a far different character, and my action upon it must have corresponded with my convictions.

Ought we now to disturb the Missouri and Texas compromises? Ought we at this late day, in attempting to annul what has been so long established and acquiesced in, to excite sectional divisions and jealousies, to alienate the people of different portions of the Union from each other, and to endanger the existence of the Union itself?

From the adoption of the federal constitution, during a period of sixty years, our progress as a nation has been without example in the annals of history. Under the protection of a bountiful Providence, we have advanced with giant strides in the career of wealth and prosperity. We have enjoyed the blessings of freedom to a greater extent than any other people, ancient or modern, under a government which has preserved order, and secured to every citizen life, liberty, and property. We have now become an example for imitation to the whole world. The friends of freedom in every

clime point with admiration to our institutions. Shall we, then, at the moment when the people of Europe are devoting all their energies in the attempt to assimilate their institutions to our own, peril all our blessings by despising the lessons of experience, and refusing to tread in the footsteps which our fathers have trodden? And for what cause would we endanger our glorious Union? The Missouri compromise contains a prohibition of slavery throughout all that vast region extending twelve and a half degrees along the Pacific, from the parallel of thirty-six degrees thirty minutes, to that of forty-nine degrees, and east from that ocean to and beyond the summit of the Rocky mountains. Why, then, should our institutions be endangered because it is proposed to submit to the people of the remainder of our newly acquired territory lying south of thirty-six degrees thirty minutes, embracing less than four degrees of latitude, the question whether, in the language of the Texas compromise, they "shall be admitted (as a State) into the Union with or without slavery." Is this a question to be pushed to such extremities by excited partizans on the one side or the other, in regard to our newly acquired distant possessions on the Pacific, as to endanger the union of thirty glorious States which constitute our confederacy? I have an abiding confidence that the sober reflection and sound patriotism of the people of all the States will bring them to the conclusion, that the dictate of wisdom is to follow the example of those who have gone before us, and settle this dangerous question on the Missouri compromise, or some other equitable compromise, which would respect the rights of all, and prove satisfactory to the different portions of the Union.

Holding as a sacred trust the executive authority for the whole Union, and bound to guard the rights of all, I should be constrained, by a sense of duty, to withhold my official sanction from any measure which would conflict with these important objects.

I cannot more appropriately close this message than by quoting from the farewell address of the father of his country. His warning voice can never be heard in vain by the American people. If the spirit of prophecy had distinctly presented to his view, more than a half century ago, the present distracted condition of his country, the language which he then employed could not have been more appropriate than it is to the present occasion. He declared:

"The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad, of your safety, of your prosperity, of that very liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that, from different causes, and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cher-

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ish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and to speak of it as a palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event be abandoned, and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

"For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens by birth or choice of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of AMERICAN which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have, in a common cause, fought and triumphed together. The independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint councils and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings, and success. With such powerful and obvious motives to union, affecting all parts of our country, while experience shall not have demonstrated its impracticability, there will always be reason to distrust the patriotism of those who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bands.

"In contemplating the causes which may disturb our union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations—*Northern* and *Southern*, *Atlantic* and *Western*; whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts is, to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations. They tend to alienate each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection."

JAMES K. POLK.

WASHINGTON, *August 14*, 1848.